

SECTION 5

Park and Recreation National Standards and Analysis



Park and Recreation

National Standards and Analysis

An essential component of the Columbia County Parks and Recreation Master Plan is a thorough inventory and analysis of the existing park facilities in the community. Site visits were conducted of each park facility to record the quantity of the current amenities that each park has and to allow the planning team to assess opportunities for additions and expansions. During the facility inventories, assessments were made regarding the age, condition, safety and accessibility of facilities.

Park Classification System

One method used to evaluate the community's level of recreation opportunities was through comparisons with national standards. In 2000, Forward 2020: Columbia County Growth Management Plan, used national standards to assess the needs of Columbia County citizens for parks and recreation facilities. That assessment concluded that the only surplus was in available park acreage.

The standards were established by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), a nonprofit organization dedicated to park, recreation and conservation activities with the primary mission of improving the quality of life for all Americans. The NRPA publication, Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines manual was written in 1983, and then updated in 1987 and 1995 with standards relating to both local and regional needs for recreation and open space to serve as a base line for communities to follow when determining needed park facilities. However, recreation trends will vary throughout the country requiring communities to determine what standards best fit their needs.

The following discussion synthesizes the information contained in the three studies. However, it should be stressed that the NRPA standards are intended to serve as planning guides only. They are not absolute and vary from community to community depending upon assessed local needs and desires. There are multiple relevant park classifications in the Columbia County recreation delivery system. This methodology has specific criteria and standards establishing perimeters for the following park classifications: mini-parks, special use parks, neighborhood parks, community parks, and regional parks.

Mini-Parks

Mini-Parks are typically one acre or less in size although they can range up to five acres; they have a service area radius of $\frac{1}{4}$ mile. The recommended quantity ratio is $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ acre per 1,000 residents. They generally provide for limited or isolated recreational needs and they frequently take advantage of unique opportunities. Appropriate recreational uses in these small spaces include picnicking, landscaped seating areas and historic or cultural interpretation. Public input should identify the desired facilities to be included in specific Mini-Park sites. However, due to their small size and limited facilities, programmed activities are usually not facilitated in these parks.




Columbia County, GA Parks & Recreation Master Plan

Service Areas

Parks

-  Community Center
-  Neighborhood
-  Community
-  Regional

Service Areas

-  1/2 Mile Radius
-  3 Mile Radius
-  Underserved

County Parks

1. Appling Park
2. Blanchard Park
3. Harlem Park
4. Patriots Park
5. Riverside Park
6. Roberts Park
7. Savannah Rapids Pavilion
8. Wildwood Park
9. Eubank Blanchard CC
10. Euclaw Creek CC
11. Reed Creek Park

Private Parks

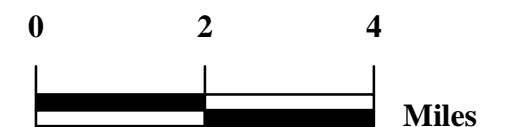
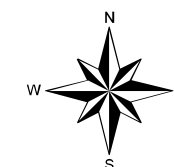
12. Little League Park

City Parks

13. Goodale Park
14. Newmantown Road Park

State Parks

15. Mistletoe State Park



NRPA suggests that communities should provide Mini-Parks equating to roughly one-quarter to one-half acre for every 1,000 residents. According to the 2000 census, Columbia County has 89,288 residents. Therefore, the acreage need for Mini-Parks is between 22 and 45 acres. The county does not currently have any facilities that meet this description or categorization.

Mini Park Prototype

Average Size: 1/3-5 acres

General Concept: A play area for children and a passive area for adults.

General Purpose: Passive use; serves neighborhoods during daytime hours within a ¼ mile radius.

Programs: No organized activities; landscape areas to be used for strolling and playing for all age groups.

Proposed Park Facilities and Land Requirements:

Children's Play Area: 1.75 acres

Apparatus Area: 1.75 acres

Shelter: 1,000 sq. ft.

Game/Tennis Courts: 1-2 acres

Walking Trails: Varies

Landscaping and Fencing: Varies

Utilities: Varies

Special Use Parks

This category can include a range of facilities that are oriented toward a single use. Historic and cultural sites, performing art facilities, community centers, swimming pools, display gardens and golf courses are all considered Special Use Parks. Acreage guidelines depend upon the program components, and service areas vary greatly as these parks are unique to specific communities.

NRPA does not have an acreage standard for Special Use Parks as the category is so variable. Columbia County's park system includes over 43 acres of special use facilities.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood Parks are typically the foundation of a community's park system. NRPA recommends 15 acres or more for a Neighborhood Park with one to two acres per 1,000 residents. The recommended service area radius is ¼ to ½ mile. Ideally, only residential roads interrupt the service area so that they are easily and safely accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists. Activities such as field and court games, playgrounds and picnicking are appropriate for these spaces.

NRPA standards indicate that communities should provide between one and two acres of Neighborhood Parks for every one thousand residents. Based on population, Columbia County's need for Neighborhood Parks is between 89 and 178 acres. The county currently has over 42 acres devoted Neighborhood Parks.

Neighborhood Park Prototype

Average Size: 5-20 acres

General Concept: Active recreational facilities supplemented with passive amenities.

General Purpose: Intense active recreation for daytime use within a half-mile radius.

Programs: Neighborhood league practice and play; spontaneous play; no large-traffic events should take place on a regular basis.

Proposed Park Facilities and Land Requirements:

Sports Fields: 2-5 acres per field

Soccer Fields: 2 acres per field

Football Fields: 2 acres per field

Running Track: 5 acres

Swimming Pool: 1-2 acres

Trail System: Varies

Shelters: 2,000 sq. ft.

Large Play Area: 2 acres

Tennis Complex: 2 acres

Game Courts: 10,000 sq. ft.

Walking Paths: ½ to 1 mile

Community Parks

Community Parks range in size from 30 to 50 acres or larger and have a service area radius from one to two miles. They typically serve several neighborhoods and focus on meeting community-based recreation needs. Community parks can be highly developed and include intense recreational activities such as athletic complexes and large aquatic facilities. They can also be more passive with a focus on nature study, trails, picnicking and open space preservation. Community parks can also offer a combination of both active and passive recreation.

NRPA recommends that between five and eight acres of Community Parks be provided for every 1,000 residents. Based on population, Columbia County's need for Community Parks is between 446 and 714 acres. The county currently has over 229 acres of Community Parks.

Community Park Prototype

Average Size: 50-100 acres

General Concept: Combine active and passive recreation facilities into a natural setting with large portions of the park remaining natural.

General Purpose: To provide a full range of services to the entire community for both day and night uses.

Program: Passive enjoyment of natural areas and environments, including lakes, wooded areas and landscaped areas; sponsoring of league play and large scale tournaments and exhibitions for all age groups.

Park Facilities and Land Requirements:

Lighted Adult Softball Complex: 10-15 acres

Lighted Youth Baseball Complex: 8-10 acres

Lighted Tennis Complex: 2 acres

Football Field: 2 acres
Soccer Complex: 10-12 acres
Basketball Courts: 1-2 acres
Picnic Area: 10-15 acres
Trails: 1 to 2 miles
Volleyball: 2-4 acres
Community Center w/Pool: 2 acres
Maintenance Area: 1 acre
Lake: 1-4 acres
Parking: Varies

Regional Parks

Regional Parks are generally 200 acres or larger and serve the communities within a one-hour drive. They preserve large areas of open space and include activities such as picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming, camping and trails. They can also include more active components but tend to focus on conservation rather than development. NRPA suggests that five to ten acres of Regional Park space should be available for each 1,000 citizens. Therefore, Columbia County's need for regional facilities is between 446 and 893 acres. The Columbia County owned regional park, Wildwood Park, consumes 975 acres of land. Other regional facilities within a one-hour drive of the center of Columbia County are bountiful totaling 3,732 acres. The total amount of regional park-land available to the people of Columbia County equals 4,707 acres, a 4,261 to 3,814 acre surplus. The regional parks not controlled by Columbia County include:

- Mistletoe State Park is a 1,920-acre state park facility located on Clarks Hill Lake. The park offers fishing, picnicking, nature trails, boating, canoeing and swimming. Fully equipped cottages can be rented, and camping sites are available for tents, trailers and RVs.
- Magnolia Springs State Park is a 1,071-acre facility south of Waynesboro in Jenkins County. The park has over ten miles of hiking and bicycle trails. Camp sites for tents, trailers and RVs are available as are rental cottages. The park has three playgrounds, a swimming pool, natural springs and a boardwalk, picnic shelters and a freshwater aquarium. There are also opportunities for fishing, boating and canoeing in the park's 28-acre lake.
- Hamburg State Park is a 741-acre facility in Washington County on Hamburg Lake. The park features fishing, boating and camping. Hamburg Park also has a restored 1921 water-powered gristmill and a museum that displays agricultural equipment.

Greenways

Although the NRPA has not developed a quantitative standard for greenways, they have proven to be an asset to many park systems. As stated in Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines, greenways " . . . tie park system components together to form a cohesive park environment." They are, in fact, linear parks that are frequently adjacent to special natural resources such as rivers and streams. They provide recreational opportunities for walkers, joggers, bicyclists and other non-motorized uses. Greenways also link the various components of a recreation system including community facilities such as schools, libraries and other parks.

Greenways can be located in a variety of settings and can be utilized for active and passive recreation activities. Julius Fabros, a professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Massachusetts, divides greenways into three categories: Ecological, Recreational and Cultural.

- **Ecological** greenways are typically located through or along natural environments such as rivers, ridgelines and coastal areas. These greenway trails provide connections to nature, protect and maintain biodiversity, minimize development and provide for wildlife migration across natural and manmade boundaries.
- **Recreational** greenways link elements through areas of diversity and significant landscapes. These can be located in rural or urban settings and range in size from local trails to international systems.
- **Cultural** greenway trails connect historically or culturally significant elements. These types of trails include elements for tourism, education, recreation and transportation. Economic benefit can be gained from cultural greenways by connecting housing and neighborhoods with retail businesses, incorporating flood prevention elements, and providing infrastructure for commuting, among many other possibilities.

Columbia County has no existing acreage designated as greenways. According to the Georgia City and County Recreation Services Study, 2001 the average acreage of greenways for the departments serving populations between 50,000 and 99,999 is 129 acres.

Acreage Standards

Mini-parks, neighborhood parks and community parks provide local or close-to-home park and recreation facilities. The 1987 NRPA classification system suggested that between 6.25 and 10.5 acres of close-to-home parkland should be available for each 1,000 members of a community. Columbia County has 315.30 acres of local parkland available to its citizens today, including the 56 acres of parkland owned by the City of Grovetown and 43.55 acres of special use county parkland. According to 2000 census data, Columbia County's population was 89,288. Based on the population projections made in Forward 2020: Columbia County Growth Management Plan, Year 2000 the following associated parkland requirements are identified in the table below:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Local Parkland Requirements</u>	<u>Deficit</u>
2000	89,288	558 to 937 acres	242.70 to 621.70 acres
2005	115,016	719 to 1207 acres	403.70 to 897.70 acres
2010	131,247	820 to 1378 acres	504.70 to 1062.70 acres
2015	147,636	922 to 1550 acres	606.70 to 1234.70 acres
2020	164,041	1066 to 1722 acres	750.70 to 1406.70 acres

The final column in the table indicates a deficit or shortage of parkland based on national standards. The current deficit is between 242.70 and 621.70 acres if no new parkland is acquired. Within twenty years, the parkland deficit will range between 750.70 and 1406.70 acres based on population projections.

Facility Standards

In addition to national acreage standards, the NRPA also developed the following facility standards for primary active recreation facilities. Figure 05.01 presents the NRPA recommendations based on population projections for Columbia County through year 2012. Based on the level of service established by the National Recreation and Park Association, Columbia County currently has a deficit in all the primary active recreational facilities.

Outdoor Basketball

In Columbia County, there are 3 basketball courts that meet the criteria of the NRPA standards. These facilities are located in Blanchard Park and Appling Park, as well as Goodale Park in Grovetown. Other basketball courts in the county are located within parking areas, which may inhibit play or cause a dangerous situation for pedestrians, thus are not counted toward the total facility count. There are three existing individual courts; based on 2000 Census population figures, 17.9 courts are suggested, so there is an existing deficit of 14.9 courts.

Tennis

Currently, there are 18 tennis courts in Columbia County including 14 county and 4 city facilities. The NRPA standard calls for over 44 tennis courts in Columbia County based on 2000 population counts, a deficit of 26 courts. Developing a tennis tournament center with a minimum of 16 to 26 courts may create a new market for the parks system and alleviate the deficit.

Baseball/Softball

Columbia County is near the suggested quantity of baseball/softball fields based on 2000 population figures. The NRPA recommends 35.7 fields for the population size of Columbia County, which has 30 total fields resulting in a deficit of 5.7 fields. Further development of fields should be located in a manner to alleviate travel time for community participants. This deficit does not involve the four-field complex operated privately at Little League Park.

Football and Soccer

Although football and soccer facilities are similar in perimeters of site impact, supply and demand and parking are major contributors to the justification for separate NRPA categories for soccer and football. There are often issues regarding the quantity of fields for practice and games. The compromise that communities have developed is multipurpose fields. The NRPA recommends soccer and football fields should be built as game-designated facilities and the multipurpose fields be for practice and overflow field activities. Recreation professionals should be aware of the rising popularity in other field sports like rugby, lacrosse and field hockey, which will compete with soccer and football for field space.

According to 2000 population figures and NRPA standards, Columbia County needs 4.5 football fields and 8.9 soccer fields. There are 3 existing football fields and 6 soccer fields creating a 1.5-field deficit for football and a 3-field deficit for soccer according to

the NRPA soccer standard, developed in 1983. Since that time, soccer has seen a rapid increase in popularity causing a greater demand in many communities. Often the 1 to 10,000 ratio does not meet the need. Lose & Associates recommends a standard of 1 soccer field per 4,000 people due to the fact that most soccer games are scheduled on the weekends rather than spread out through the entire week. Using this ratio, Columbia County has a 16.3-soccer field deficit.

Multiple Recreation Court

The multiple recreation court is a combination of a basketball court and a tennis court. Columbia County now has one court, but the NRPA standard is one per 10,000 or 8.9 courts based on 2000 population figures. The 7.9-court deficit should ideally be made up in neighborhood parks.

Golf Course (18 hole) and Golf Driving Range

There are no golf courses in the Columbia County parks system at this time. However, there are several public golf courses in the county with reasonable greens fees. Additionally, future plans have included a new public golf course to be built adjacent to Patriots Park. It is not recommended that Columbia County pursue any investment in a golf course or driving range at this time. However, golf is a revenue generator when there is demand within the community.

Running Track

There are no running tracks in the Columbia County parks system. As defined by NRPA standards, a running track is a 4.3-acre facility, ¼ mile in length and oval shaped with 4-8 lanes. The running track can hold a track and field meet, and support casual walking/jogging at times when practices or meets are not occurring. The NRPA recommends one track per 20,000. This facility may be located in combination with schools, or at a community recreation megacenter as an outdoor facility. Based on 2000 population information, Columbia County has a need for over four running tracks.

The walking trails at Blanchard Park and Eubank Blanchard community centers provide a greenway-type walking/jogging/biking facility. Patriots Park has a system of looped concrete walkways that also provide a walking pathway around the football field in the park. These facilities do not qualify for a running track because they are not constructed to any sort of regulation size or materials that may support a track and field meet.

Indoor Ice Hockey

This sport has no facilities in the Columbia County parks system. The NRPA recommends one facility per 100,000 residents, which can be included in a community recreation megacenter if the community will support the need. Based on population projects, Columbia County would have a population need for this facility by the year 2005. A private enterprise, however, provides an indoor ice rink on Bobby Jones Expressway in Augusta, on the Columbia County/Richmond County line. This facility may already be providing the need for the county at the present, but if the future demand of Columbia County should demand additional ice facilities, a feasibility study should be instigated.

Other Community Standards and National Trends

Figure 05.01 lists a category entitled Other Community Standards and National Trends that has been collated for further analysis in addition to the traditional NRPA standards. These listed recreational trends were derived from a variety of communities' examples of parks, recreation and open space standards. These communities range in geographic areas, climates and governmental jurisdictions to provide the most thorough perspective of national comprehensive park and recreation planning.

The standards listed for playgrounds, picnic shelters and trails come from Kansas City, Missouri. The park philosophy in Kansas City is that there cannot be too many parks. Included in these standards is a detailed classification system of trails:

Hiking	1 mile/4,000 population
Nature/interpretive	1 mile/2,500 population
Equestrian	1 mile/6,250 population
Bicycle/jogging	1 mile/2,000 population
Exercise	1 Trail/7,500 population
Overall standard	1 mile/3,000 population

The NRPA has not established any standards for indoor community spaces. Examples throughout the country indicate that indoor community space is a need that should be addressed on a case-by-case basis. In the NRPA publication, Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines, examples of various communities' standards for recreation areas are included the appendices. In some instances, these various standards exceed the NRPA suggestions. These community standards and national trends are included in Figure 05.01 and the full text included in the NRPA publication is available in Appendix A.

Precedent established in these communities, public input and analysis of existing facilities aid in determining the proper facility standards for Columbia County. In the District of Columbia, there are established standards for gymnasiums, cultural centers and community centers on a per capita basis. These standards were founded based on a demand study, existing facility supply, and a comparison of participation numbers versus actual capacity. The recommendation for community centers includes two types of facilities -- one includes facilities for wellness and health needs, community meeting space, activity rooms, and various outdoor activities; the other type of community center that the Washington system offers, the community megacenter, surpasses the latter facility to include game facilities for swimming, softball, rugby and tennis.

Clarksville, Tennessee has a population of around 105,000 with three community centers to serve its citizens. In a recent comprehensive recreation master plan, this community indicated that the ratio of 1/35,000 was not adequate to satisfy the needs of the community. A recommendation of 1/20,000 was determined for this community with the understanding that these facilities would include, at a minimum, a gymnasium, fitness equipment, activity and meeting rooms, and office space.

Based on discussed examples, public input and professional experience, it is recommended that Columbia County pursue a variety of indoor community spaces. Currently, there are three community centers in Columbia County that consist primarily

ly of meeting rooms. The indoor community space at Patriots Park has racquetball courts, a wellness room, two gymnasiums, a room suitable for martial arts and fitness classes, and offices. To meet the needs of the community in a comprehensive manner, community recreation centers are recommended at a ratio of 1:30,000. These facilities include a gymnasium equipped for indoor basketball, gymnastics and volleyball, community meeting/activity space, office space and fitness/wellness facilities. At a ratio of 1:50,000, community recreation megacenters are recommended that include the amenities of the community recreation center, but may also contain an indoor pool for recreation and competition swimming. The community pool is recommended at a ratio of 1:20,000. The indoor pool facilities may also include a small pool for therapeutic aquatic programs. The outdoor pool facility may consist of indoor and outdoor pools, splash play facilities, diving wells and other aquatic facilities to provide the County with positive revenue generation.

Existing Facility Assessment

The completion of evaluations on each of the 11 existing park sites and community centers revealed concerns that were consistent throughout the system and that are common in many park systems around the country. The most prevalent deficiency in the system was the lack of fully accessible park facilities as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines. Recommendations have been made to increase accessibility in and around parks by providing paved walks from parking areas to amenities and providing paved walks between those amenities. ADA guidelines have been in place for over 10 years, and compliance with these guidelines should be made a high priority.

Parking Standards

Through interviews and site visits, an evident problem throughout the parks system is the shortage of adequate parking. In the Columbia County Growth Management Plan, Forward 2020, existing parking space allocations are listed for each park. A successful park will have an appropriate number of parking spaces in the appropriate location. Both parameters play a role in determining the safety and quality of the park user's experience while visiting a Columbia County park facility.

In the NRPA Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines, Appendix D, parking guidelines and principals are explained. Many factors need to be analyzed to ensure adequate parking is provided at each park site. These variables include access to public transportation, population density, neighborhood pedestrian access, facility use, opportunities for shared parking with adjacent land uses and anticipated quantity of park use. Both Patriots Park and Riverside Park contain large numbers of sports fields that require large areas dedicated to parking. These community parks are primarily accessed by car, as opposed to neighborhood and mini parks that are more pedestrian-friendly. However, any park located in a portion of the County that will likely be accessed by vehicle should be considered for minimum parking standards for Columbia County Parks.

In addition to the aforementioned parking standards, many park departments establish standards for parking quantities associated with specific facilities in a park including soccer, baseball and football fields. Figure 5.2 depicts standards set by Gwinnett

County's parks department for specific park facilities. The numbers are to be in addition to parking required for the open parkland on a per acre basis. For a community park, a minimum of five spaces parking per acre is recommended, plus the parking spaces required for athletic facilities.

Parking Recommendations (figure 5.2)

Soccer Field	60 parking spaces/field
Football/ Cheerleaders	200 parking spaces/field
Softball/Baseball Field	60 parking spaces/field
Group Picnic Pavilion	35-150 parking spaces (depends on pavilion size)

It is recommended that all parking areas be designed to reflect the natural lay of the site, to be functional, and (where possible) to separate pedestrian and vehicular routes. For example, in the prototypical community park with regular sports league play, it is suitable to design the parking facilities with curb and gutter, landscaped planting islands, and paved routes because this type of park will receive high quantities of use and the park user desires to visit a nicely maintained facility. In the instance of a passive nature park, the park user is looking to escape into a natural environment. The parking lot is the passageway to this escape and should be designed as an appropriate transition bringing the natural highlights of the park into the parking lot. In the passive nature park environment, the parking lot can be less formal in design and materials. In locations where erosion is not a serious problem, these parking lots can be "paved" with gravel, a sand/clay mix, or even turfgrass.

The current configuration of parking and access drives adjacent to the youth ball fields at Patriots Park is an example of vehicular and pedestrian circulation patterns that are in conflict with each other. The entry drive serves the recreation center, soccer fields and administrative offices in the park. This parking lot layout forces the pedestrian to cross the main vehicular route to the aforementioned facilities in order to access baseball facilities. Riverside Park is a better example of how to create a safe parking lot environment for pedestrians. Here, parking lots branch off the main vehicular access route creating pockets of parking spaces to be used by users of specific facilities. This division of traffic flow protects the pedestrian from the risks involved with crossing the path of quick moving vehicles.

Design Standards

Other problems observed were the lack of consistency in maintenance, signage and built structures. The primary inconsistencies in maintenance related to portions of the park property that were outside of the playing surface of an athletic field. The actual playing surfaces of the athletic fields (soccer, baseball, softball, etc.) were maintained to a much higher standard than the surrounding facilities, such as volleyball courts, playground facilities and picnic zones. The County should develop a maintenance standard that establishes levels of maintenance for all types of facilities. While athletic fields intended for league and tournament play certainly demand a higher level of maintenance, open lawn space must also be similarly maintained for safe play. These standards should include regular inspections of playground equipment, installation of safety surfaces beneath equipment, provision of paved access between amenities and improved maintenance in areas surrounding the community centers. A standard is also

needed regarding the provision of paved pads beneath picnic tables and benches. The standard should address accessibility to a portion of tables and benches within any given park to achieve compliance with ADA. Placing these facilities on a paved surface also reduces maintenance.

Improved standardization is needed for built structures such as concession buildings, restrooms, dugouts and scorer's stands. These standards can help the overall appearance of Columbia County's parks become identifiable with the public, as well as ensure that contracted designers work within a system of County standards when park designs are solicited. These standards should include amenities that are designed with low-maintenance, highly-durable materials, yet be aesthetically pleasing and inviting for the various user groups. Standards should be designed for the most recently available Life Safety and ADA requirements, as well as the Southern Building Code and any other applicable safety standard or building code.

Example: The current standards introduced in recently-constructed projects for the restroom/concession/scorer's buildings include poor materials selections and spaces that do not seem to function well for the needs of the staff and user groups. Materials such as the "synthetic stucco" or EIFS (Exterior Insulation and Finish System) are not the most suitable material for a recreational park setting because the material will not withstand the abuse that a park receives from children with bats and balls or from vandals. The EIFS material should be either eliminated from this design, or only used in portions of the building that will not be in direct contact with park users, such as the areas a minimum of 10' above the ground level. Materials such as concrete block, solid concrete or hardy plank siding are much more durable and should be considered as materials to replace EIFS on future buildings. Spatially, the building needs additional storage space. Improved surface drainage outside of the restroom doors is also needed.

New design standards could be developed in conjunction with the next new park. Each park that is designed using the park standards should have the standards reviewed by the newest contracted designer, so that the materials and building methods remain fresh, while keeping the original design intent intact. As older park facilities are upgraded, new structures should be constructed that are consistent with new standards. Other policies that could serve to improve the overall knowledge and efficiency of maintaining park facilities would be the adoption of a list of preferred vendors for lighting, irrigation, and site amenities such as tables, benches and playgrounds. Another recommendation is to involve the parks staff in the design process of future park improvements, as they will program and maintain these facilities.

Park Signage

There is a need to develop a park signage standard that is consistent across the community identifying facilities that are owned and maintained by the County Parks and Recreation Department. Wildwood Park is equipped with an attractive entry sign mounted on stone walls while other parks have less attractive signs, or no sign identification at all. A signage standard should be developed that adopts the stone sign concept, placing signs at varying scales at each park entry and at each community center facility. The use of a standard palate of colors and materials will serve as an immediate identifier of the facilities' presence in Columbia County. This is especially important in less developed parks that have lower use and visibility.

Playground Safety Standards

The playground equipment in many parks is out-dated and not up to current safety and accessibility standards. We recommend replacing unsafe or un-repairable equipment with newer equipment. The location of the playground activity areas within the parks must also be reviewed. Playground areas should not be placed in areas where individuals using the playground facilities will be harmed by stray balls, vehicular traffic or bicycle traffic. Also, we recommend improvements for the installation of better safety surfaces around play equipment and inclusion of paved access points from handicapped parking spaces to the playground entry area.

Recommendations have been made to install better safety surfaces around play equipment and increase accessibility to amenities throughout the system. Evaluations have followed guidelines established by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), safety standards for play equipment set by the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, and the International Play Equipment Manufacturers' Association. These organizations also establish guidelines for developing facilities that are in the best interest of the users. Working with the County legal department, committees should be formed to address issues related to safety and accessibility and establish standards for Columbia County parks and facilities. The following provides a brief interpretation of the regulations established by the various organizations mentioned above.

Another prominent problem within park systems is the non-compliance of playground equipment to safety standards developed by organizations such as the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), and the International Play Equipment Manufacturers' Association (IPEMA). The standards proposed by these organizations are meant to serve as a guideline to help create atmospheres that are safe and pose a minimal threat of injury. Studies show that the majority of injuries sustained on public playgrounds are to the head as a result of falls from the play structure to the ground. For this reason, consideration has been given to what the critical fall height would be in which a fatal head injury might occur. Guidelines have been established measuring the impact performance of various materials. As with ADA issues, alternatives should be studied and a standard established for implementation of safe play environments throughout the parks system.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

One of the largest issues facing many public and private organizations is the ability to provide complete accessibility to handicapped citizens. Park and recreation departments are not exempt from these requirements. Legislation requires provisions for access routes to primary park amenities for those who are physically impaired.

Primary access routes as described in the Recommendations for Accessibility Guidelines: Recreation Facilities and Outdoor Developed Areas, by the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, are defined in the following manner:

Outdoor recreation access routes are the paths that connect the primary developed spaces and elements that are basic to the recreation experience being offered at the site. For example, the outdoor recreation access routes at a picnic ground are the paths linking the parking area, restrooms, picnic units, and water hydrants. While many of these elements—parking area, restroom, and water hydrant—are not the primary reason for a person to visit the site, they are the basic developed elements that serve all visitors.

Designers and managers, in consultation with users, must determine which of the developed activities and elements at a recreation site are basic to the recreation experience being offered. Further, they must secure that there is a comprehensive system of outdoor recreation access routes that connect all primary elements and spaces with each other and with accessible parking spaces and facility entrances. This determination should be based on visitor expectations as well as the level of development at the site.

The ADA regulations that govern design standards can be left up to some interpretation where athletic facilities are concerned; however, they are very specific in their requirements of restroom and pathway design. Before renovation of old facilities, or construction of new ones, the Parks and Recreation Department should seek the counsel of the County's legal department to interpret laws and develop a standard by which they will begin to create a system that is sensitive to the needs of all users.

Security and Vandalism

Park properties are not immune to criminal acts. Nationwide, many park systems have seen various events and have shown varying degrees of damage due to the few park users that visit a park property with the intent to cause mischief or commit a crime. Two methods that have proven to discourage these activities include Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and police-based park patrols. Recommendations to improve site-based problems that create atmospheres for criminal activity have been made to lessen the potential for vandalism or other deviant behaviors. The addition of lighting in parks and the practice of clearing thick vegetative growth to improve visibility into and around the park are two methods that have been suggested. Good park design can also help reduce criminal disturbances. Whenever possible, park activity zones should be visible from vehicular and pedestrian traffic corridors to allow maximum visibility into the park and eliminate areas where vandals can hide or congregate. Material selection is another key factor to reduce destruction in park facilities. Providing materials that are highly resistance to destruction reduces the frequency for repairs or replacement. Facilities that offer something for everyone increase the number of visitors to the park, reducing the actions of criminals or vandals.

Although having a dedicated park patrol officer is the most desirable type of police presence in parks, on-duty uniformed police officers can be used effectively to help keep the park system safe for all users. Officers can start by monitoring parks at times when the number of park users is lower and having patrols walk or ride bikes through the park rather than driving through the park parking lots and access drives. Hours that would be most appropriate for scheduling patrols would be evenings after six and on weekends when fewer staff are located in parks.

Community Swimming Pools

According to National Recreation and Parks Association standards, a community the size of Columbia County should provide a minimum of 4.5 public swimming pools. Projected growth over the next ten years would indicate the need for an additional pool by 2012 bringing the total to 6.9. As public demand for additional pools increases, the proposed sites should be considered for development. The provision of a pool at the new community park location creates an opportunity for a revenue center for the city. Locating pools in conjunction with community centers and multi-field recreation complexes creates a synergy needed to attract more swimmers and increase swimming revenue. Over time, if the need for additional pools becomes evident, opportunities for development should be explored in park district #1 or #2. The preferred location is in conjunction with a community center or in a community park with high-density residential development in close proximity. Community input should be solicited to determine the best pool locations in the county.

Based on discussed examples, public input, and professional experience, it is recommended that Columbia County pursue a variety of indoor community spaces. Currently, there are two community centers in Columbia County that consist primarily of meeting rooms. The indoor community space at Patriots Park has racquetball courts, a wellness room, two gymnasiums, a room suitable for martial arts and fitness classes, and offices. To meet the needs of the community in a comprehensive manner, community recreation centers are recommended at a ratio of 1:30,000 residents. These facilities include a gymnasium equipped for indoor basketball, gymnastics and volleyball, community meeting/activity space, office space and fitness/wellness facilities. At a ratio of 1:50,000, community recreation megacenters are recommended that include the amenities of the community recreation center, but may also contain an indoor pool for recreation and competition swimming. Community pools are recommended at a ratio of 1:20,000. We recommend pools be developed in Columbia County in association with Community Centers. Two indoor pools are recommended along with three outdoor pools. Community Centers and Aquatic facilities are described in more detail in this section of the report.

Items that may be included in the different types of community centers are listed below.

Community Recreation Center

- Gymnasium (indoor basketball, gymnastics and volleyball)
- Community meeting/activity space/craft rooms
- Office space
- Fitness/wellness facilities
- Restrooms

Community Mega Recreation Center

- Gymnasium (indoor basketball, gymnastics and volleyball)
- Community meeting/activity space/craft rooms
- Class rooms
- Game rooms
- Stage

Kitchen
 Office space
 Fitness/wellness facilities
 Restrooms
 Indoor pool for recreation and competition swimming
 Outdoor aquatic facilities
 Racquetball courts

Aquatic Facilities:

District 1 - indoor pool, competition
 District 2 - indoor pool, competition and therapeutic
 Outdoor family aquatics complex
 District 3 - Outdoor family aquatics complex
 District 4 - Outdoor family aquatics complex

Parks and Recreation Division Office

Renovated for the Parks and Recreation Department staff in 1997, the Columbia County Parks and Recreation office is located at Patriots Park, adjacent to the gymnasium building. The office houses all of the current programming staff and administrative staff, providing limited room for future staff expansion. Park surveys revealed that 30% of respondents felt the office was in an inconvenient location; other respondents wrote in that they were unaware of the office location. The existing building provides adequate space for current staff; however, the need for expanded office space to accommodate key staff additions in several convenient locations throughout the county cannot be overlooked.

Common among many Parks and Recreation Departments is an office location within a large community park. The addition of a new community park within the Columbia County system would provide an ideal location for a new administrative office. As the County's population continues to grow, the long-term goal should be an eventual relocation of much of the personnel of the current department office to sites within community parks. Until that time, the existing office spaces should be filled as expansion occurs and additional office space within parks should be utilized as necessary to accommodate immediate growth and allow capital dollars to be spent on other more critical issues within the park system. District staff supervisors for programming and maintenance should be relocated into the large community parks and community centers once office spaces are constructed.

New Park Construction

The lack of involvement in the construction of park facilities was a common discussion with park staff. Many parks departments assign certain key members of their staffs to have significant involvement in the design and construction drawing phase of development. It is recommended that members of the planning and programming staff be involved in the design portion of the park development process - including master plan level and construction design development level. The maintenance staff, especially those involved in building and grounds maintenance, should be involved in the construction document portion of the park design development phase. The type of input

these staff members can offer to the designers in invaluable. This is especially crucial in the selection of equipment and materials for the final design elements.

These staff members should also compile a list of preferred vendors, materials and equipment for use in the construction of the parks and park facilities. For example, the maintenance staff should provide designers and engineers with preferred equipment and vendor lists so that the finished product will be similar to other parks within the County Park system. This type of continuity in materials can create an identity for a county-owned and -maintained park, and will help create an easily-identifiable standard to which the community can relate.

Neighborhood Parks

The Columbia County Parks system should implement a number of new, small-acreage parks to serve neighborhood communities. The properties should be smaller in size -- a maximum of 25 acres -- and located adjacent to subdivisions, existing population centers and schools. Pedestrian access to the parks should be encouraged, but vehicular access and parking should be planned.

Program elements in a neighborhood park will serve multiple facets of the community simultaneously. These parks should contain facilities that cater to families and individuals who prefer passive or individual recreation. These selected park components will offer opportunities for varied activities and interest groups.

- Open space/play field - relatively smooth turf surface of one acre or more for open recreation
- Activity building and its associated parking (does not require permanent assigned staff) in lieu of Community Center
- Perimeter paved Multi-Purpose Trail (for walking, jogging, biking and skating) with mileage markers and optional Exercise Stations
- Outdoor Seniors Activities (horseshoe pits, pavilion with permanent checker/chess tables, etc.)
- Nature Trails through areas of scenic or natural beauty
- Irrigated Turf Fields for informal sports and non-irrigated meadows for free play
- Tennis, Basketball and Sand Volleyball Courts (two of each maximum)
- Fishing pond
- Picnic pavilions with dedicated parking; free-standing restroom building and grills
- Playgrounds with separate zones and equipment (multiple play structures and swings) designed to serve children from toddlers to pre-teens
- "Splash Ground" aquatic play structure (does not require lifeguards) in lieu of Aquatic Center.
- Skate Park and Disk Golf facilities to serve teens and pre-teens
- Dog Park (2-3 acre fenced area with: "pooper scoopers", trash cans, paved double check entrance gate area, paved watering/hosing zone, signage, dedicated parking, optional Dog Agility Course if larger space is available)
- Retained meadow and woodland to provide shade plus variety of scenery and topography for the routes of both the multi-purpose and nature trails

Park/School Sites

A formal lease agreement between the school system and the parks and recreation division should be explored. Site-specific agreements could be drawn to ensure that each organization benefits equally. Increased indoor programming by the parks and recreation department could necessitate use of school gymnasiums as necessary for youth basketball, after school programs or other activities. School sites that are utilized regularly by the parks and recreation division could have an agreement that addresses programming, maintenance and capital improvements made to the facilities. Other sites not utilized by the parks and recreation division should continue to be maintained by the school system. The school maintenance program should adopt maintenance standards that have been established by the parks and recreation division to provide maximum safety and usability for both user groups.

Consolidation - Columbia County Parks and Recreation Department and City Parks and Recreation Departments

In order for the Columbia County Parks and Recreation Department to provide a high level of service to all of its citizens, it is the recommendation of this report that the county enters into joint-use and managerial agreements for the City of Grovetown park facilities.

The City of Grovetown has two primary recreation facilities: Newmantown Road Park and Goodale Park. Newmantown Road Park is an approximately 55-acre recreation area located within the Grovetown city limits south of the city. The park has four baseball fields, one soccer field, two tennis courts, a restroom/concessions building, picnic areas, a playground, and walking trails. Goodale Park is approximately seven acres and has two baseball fields, two tennis courts, a basketball court, a picnic area, a concession building, and a walking trail.

Although the county does have a number of recreational facilities that can be used by Columbia County residents in the Grovetown area, it must be stressed that these facilities are not the same standard as the new facilities constructed by the City of Grovetown with SPLOST funds. While the City has SPLOST funds for capital projects, it has not authorized funds to operate a parks and recreation department. The Columbia County Recreation and Leisure Services Department maintenance crews are currently maintaining Grovetown's athletic fields so that county residents can use the park for league games. Because county staff are maintaining these facilities, they are considered in the inventory of existing acreage and facilities available to Columbia County citizens. However, areas of the county served by those two parks are not receiving the same level of services as portions of the city served by the Columbia County Parks and Recreation Department.

City and county leaders should research, evaluate and give serious consideration to the possibility of combining their park and recreation facilities. This joint effort would be a plus for every resident in Columbia County. The duplication of efforts is extremely inefficient. The Columbia County Parks and Recreation Department already provides extensive services to Grovetown residents at no extra charge, as city residents already

pay county property taxes. On the other hand, Grovetown residents pay property taxes to both the city and the county. In effect, Grovetown taxpayers are paying twice for the cost of recreation for those who live in Grovetown's city limits.

The most efficient and effective provisions for recreation to citizens of Columbia County and Grovetown can be accomplished through a merger of the independent departments. Suggested merger documents are included for review in Appendices.

According to interviews with Grovetown's mayor, there is no formal full-time City Parks and Recreation department or staff. Currently, one individual has been named as someone who is in charge of the two parks within the city, although this position is not a full-time position for the City. The athletic fields are maintained by Columbia County's maintenance department, although all park property outside of the fields is maintained by City of Grovetown staff. Formal agreements between the City and County should be formed so that services are not duplicated and all of Columbia County's citizens receive the same level of service, whether they reside in incorporated or unincorporated areas of Columbia County. The County can then staff the parks in this portion of the County (District 3) with programmers, maintenance staff, and other necessary individuals who will provide the Grovetown and Harlem citizens with points of contact for program registration and program facilities.

Funding for the combined departments should reflect the operations and capital needs of both departments. The county and city should enter into a contract that stipulates a fixed percentage of operations and capital cost that will be paid by each. These costs can be based on population percentages of the overall population or a similar method of measure. The City can assist in maintenance and operating cost to provide a high quality facility to Grovetown residents, while the County can assist in further development of the parks in the Grovetown and Harlem areas, or District 3.